

Exploring Black Experiences in Austin Clarke's *More*

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Abstract

The paper examines how Idora's experiences in Toronto—a city toward which she harbours conflicting feelings—have shaped her life. She despises it for the isolation, alienation, racism, violence, and incrimination, but towards the book's end, she also loves it because it gives her a sense of belonging and helps her grow psychologically in Toronto. In the novel's depictions of various facets of Toronto life, the article examines the Black experience. Toronto is shown as a city that practises racism and segregation, is plagued by violence and subsequent racial crimes, and is most importantly a multicultural metropolis.

Keywords: Toronto, immigrant, racism, discrimination, alienation, injustice

Full Paper

Austin Clarke's *More* emphasises the difficult adjustment of a West Indian immigrant to the metropolis, who is much more ostracized due to her race, gender, and age. Idora finds herself dislocated in the city of Toronto, much like Jonah in the belly of the whale, but by the book's end, she has reconciled herself to the way her varied yet profound experiences have changed the city. Idora's tale of uprooting and loss, which began with anxiety and terror, comes to a close when she reaches a spiritual maturity and accepts her fate as determined by Toronto with a stoic resignation. The study examines in depth three facets of black experience in Toronto: racial violence, racial discrimination, and Toronto's image as a cosmopolitan or immigrant city. Stolar writes in her article "Afro-Caribbean Immigrant Experiences in the White City: Austin Clarke's Toronto" writes: "The immigrant's marginalization, and sometimes alienation, within the city produces an "immigrant city," one that exists in the interstitial spaces of the city" (83). The texts by Clarke make changes to how Toronto is seen. "World within the city" highlighting the underlying injustice of the multicultural city to the coloured people confined to their ghettos living on the margins. They remain socially and economically outsiders (99).

Idora considers herself to be an outcast, and other passengers shun her when they are in the metro. When Idora tells a woman who is pleased with her English accent that she was born in Canada, the woman looks at her in astonishment. As she rides the streetcar back to her house, she notices the guys coming home from their brief survival jobs. She understands their suffering from discrimination brought on by a lack of "Canadian experience," a phrase used to reject hiring coloured individuals (13). Idora develops inferiority complex because of racial discrimination in Toronto. She knows that she looks "dangerous" and "threatening" (176). The unfavourable perception of Black people in Toronto contributes to an increase in racial prejudice. The print and electronic media actively contribute to the bad portrayal of black people, particularly the missing men: "that they are killers of other black men; that they are gangsters; that they call their own women "hos"; that they are violent; that they sell and use drugs" (41). The media emphasises violence in their reporting of stories. It never discusses their academic or intellectual accomplishments or goals. Media portrayals of black children killing one another and "breeding like pigs" are abhorrent.

She is perceived as a woman of convenient morality since she is a single black mother. On their first date, a University of Toronto student wants to take advantage of her since, in his words, she "didn't have any dignity" (12). She is viewed as a shoplifter in the Eaton store. According to Frantz Fanon, white gaze creates the black body "woven out of stories and anecdotes," making it impossible for the black being to have an ontology. She feels ashamed of her own race because black guys are consistently treated less favourably. She overhears three black children her son's age speaking in the metro. Her discomfort is increased by their discourse, which supports the unfavourable image portrayed in the media. The essay makes the argument that the media's creation of stereotypes forces people to accept them and behave accordingly. Barrett says in his book *Blackening Canada*, In Canada, "His [Clarke's] characters continue to feel social immobility in Canada as they are abjected from the nation or penned in by constricting stereotypes of blackness" (68). "Still Angry: An Interview with Austin Clarke" (13-27). In an interview, Isaacs asks Clarke to comment on the title of "Canada's angriest man" (20) handed to him, and Clarke claimed that he felt much angrier while growing older and experiencing "quiet fury," particularly in response to the newly coined term "Black violence" (21) that the press used to justify racial profiling. He was angry because he saw no possibility of "the black man getting his righteous measure of respect in this city" (21).

The police shooting death of Albert Johnson at his residence in 1978 is frequently brought up. His death sparked demonstrations and protests, but in 1980, the two White police officers accused of his manslaughter were found not guilty. His head being "blasted to smithereens!" serves as a powerful metaphor for the racist brutality the police in Toronto perpetrate. When she resided on Grace Street, her son, young BJ, was imprisoned and subjected to racial epithets just because a childhood joke involving riding a bike was made into a crime. He is later identified as a suspect in a car theft. He was envious of accomplished "goddam blacks, who were not even born here" due to his own academic failure and frustration (210). Clarke writes on his own anxiety about living in Toronto in the 1960s. In Membering, He was confronted with...the environment of intense bodily anxiety, of the expectation that a police officer may shoot me — bang-bang, you're dead, dead — (Clarke) In the article, Stolar says in his book "Afro-Caribbean Immigrant Experiences in the White City: Austin Clarke's Toronto" that the black experience of multiculturalism in Toronto is commended and critiqued. With its "often ambiguous or paradoxical portrayals of Toronto as both an immigrant, multicultural, global, and white metropolis or as coexisting cities," Clarke's texts "beg" attention (88). Bertram, who is tired of working odd jobs in Toronto, intends to leave the country because he believes that multiculturalism is a fraud and that black people are not accepted there. All this nonsense around multiculturalisms (87). McKittrick in his journal "Wait Canada Anticipate Black." critiques the multiculturalism policy's bureaucratic implementation, which excludes blackness from the nation-building process (243).

Idora witnesses the exploitation of educated foreigners in Toronto. Highly educated men and women are employed as janitors, maids, taxi drivers, or attendants in the Parliament Street neighbourhood (114). The women in Kameel Azan's salon also make fun of multiculturalism. "Toronto is made up of different ghettos. Racial ghettos, ethnic ghettos (256). Stolar borrows Stanley Fish's phrase "boutique multiculturalism," which attracts tourists but "the superficial celebration of variety sustains cultural division" (85). Regardless of their status, the terms "multicultural" and "immigrant" separate people who were born in Canada from those who were born elsewhere (88). The positive aspects of black living in Toronto's mixed environment also exist. Idora is psychologically relieved because she can have a Barbadian experience in Toronto and have a sense of belonging. As soon as Idora connects with black culture in the city, she feels at home. The Kensington Market and Trinity College Kitchen are highlighted as two Toronto locations with vibrant multinational communities. She works as the Assistant Manager of Daytime and Supper Meals at Trinity College Kitchen. She adores her employment because she appreciates the multicultural atmosphere at the college, where students from "white and black and coloured" (5) backgrounds interact and have fun together. The second location is Kensington Market, which features international cuisine, clothing, and colourful people from all over the world. Josephine was astounded

by the large variety of faces, foods, languages, and clothing. Her lack of awareness of their existence reveals white complacency. They remain distant and ignore other people. The physical location for the novel's action in Toronto, where Idora is keeping a vigil in her depressing basement apartment, "Jonah" in the belly of the whale, to lament her husband's betrayal and her son BJ's absence. She has been there for almost thirty years, but she still struggles to fit in. In the *Blackening Canada* chapter "'I'm Running for My Life": Mobility in Austin Clarke's Recent Fiction," Paul Barret states that Idora's mobility, which is a combination of a pilgrimage and a personal trip, reimagines urban environments from the perspective of the black diaspora. In spite of the fact that the city's spaces do not reflect Idora's existence, as she goes through the city, she leaves traces of her past and present longings, which serves as a strategy for overcoming her marginalisation (66).

In order to escape her "first job," "Island," Bertram, her kid, and her ethnic identity, Barrett employs the idea of Idora in perpetual flight. However, she still ends up being what she least wants to be: "A conspicuous minority." a foreigner. a woman of colour (193). Jonah was also escaping for his life (272). When Jonah acknowledges that he is to blame for his own problems, he is saved. Idora believes that failing to integrate black children is the fault of both Toronto and parents. She believes she has been a negligent parent, and she also believes that males have been negligent in playing the protective responsibilities that are expected of them. Idora's time in Toronto was difficult in many ways. She is also asked the same query that Jonah was when the captain questioned him, "From where have you come?" (270). The West Indian immigrants are also referred to as "Jonahs" by the pastor when he discusses their challenging adjustment to life in Toronto. The stoic resignation that Jonah learned through his ordeal and the spiritual experience she had while preaching brings her salvation. The event has energised and changed her.

According to Isaacs, who describes *More* in his article "Caribbean-Canadian Reinfunsroman: The Aging Female in Austin Clarke's Later Novels." "wherein aged women protagonists learn to love their invisibility as they ripen towards more self-knowledge, independence, and an appreciation of past injustices," it is akin to rebirth (366). She does not cry as she takes her loss or her son's lifeless body with stoic resignation. She has a unique perspective. There is a sense of acceptance of the city. She admits that she is more black than she had ever imagined and for the first time accepts her ethnicity and her colour. She comes to terms with the location by acknowledging her racial identity. It is ultimately difficult to draw the conclusion that his portrayal of Toronto changed significantly over time in his works. More shows two opposing approaches to dealing with the city: Idora's refusal to pledge racial allegiance as long as BJ is alive, and BJ's refusal to assimilate and keep to his race. Their bedrooms' various colour schemes clearly show how differently they approach things. Idora's bedroom, which is completely white from walls to linens, exposes her pitiful attempt to adopt whiteness as a form of mimicry—which Lacan translates as camouflage—to blend in with the city, while BJ's bedroom, which is entirely black and decorated with images of Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, emphasises his racial allegiance and resistance to racial discrimination. The futility of both approaches to combat racial discrimination is demonstrated by Clarke. Characters stigmatised by class or ethnicity continue to live in "segregated and isolated" Toronto in *More* is almost identical to the Toronto depicted in the Toronto Trilogy.

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